locality of capture, based on this list, which would fit with the known range of the Saffron-cowled Blackbird.

In the light of this information, it appears that the bird was probably misidentified by Gil Lletget and the validity of *Icterus xantholaemus* Gil 1918 should therefore be rejected, when it becomes a synonym of *Xanthopsar flavus* (Gmelin 1788).

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Shape of avian eggs: a response to Barta and Székely

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Barta & Székely (1997) examined the shapes of avian eggs and made predictions on the expected shape for clutches of varying size, based on mathematical calculations relating to efficient incubation. They predict that:

1. The optimum shape for a one-egg clutch is spherical.
2. For a two or three egg clutch it is biconical.
3. For four eggs, the shape should be conical (pointed).
4. In clutches of over five/seven eggs it should again be spherical (the text says five, but the summary says seven).

In their discussion, the authors conclude that "The predicted relation between egg shape and clutch size is supported by a preliminary survey in several avian taxa". However, the first of their predictions is completely erroneous and the generality of the remainder both unproven and unlikely. As regards single egg clutches, Walters (1994) is incorrectly cited as evidence that albatrosses, fulmars and storm-petrels (which form the Procellariformes, not Procellaridae) lay spherical eggs. In fact, these birds generally lay cylindrical, elliptical or longitudinal eggs (see Walters 1994, p. 20 for definitions and illustrations of these shapes), but never spherical. Furthermore, I am unaware of any bird species laying a single egg clutch in which the egg is spherical.

Biconical eggs are rare in nature, and are not confined to clutches of two or three. They are found most often in grebes, which lay from 1 to 9 eggs, most commonly four. Waders typically lay 4 eggs and these are usually strongly conical. However, clutches of 4 eggs occur in many species which do not lay conical eggs. Spherical eggs typically occur in birds that nest in holes, such as kingfishers and bee-eaters. Clutch size in these varies from 3 upwards to 10 or so.

Although essentially a popular book, Walters (1994) contains adequate information on egg shape and clutch size to have allowed for objective preliminary quantitative testing of the predictions generated. Furthermore, based on nearly 30 years curating what is probably the world's largest egg collection in the Natural History Museum, Tring, I strongly doubt the general validity of any of their predictions.

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